

Mysterious seeds continue to show up in Delaware mailboxes

DOVER, Del. (August 4, 2020) – Over the past week, Delawareans continued to receive unsolicited packages of mysterious seeds appearing to originate in China. As of August 3, citizens from all 50 states, Canada, Australia, and member nations of the European Union have reported the presence of similar unwanted shipments.

Due to the increased volume of people reporting the receipt of illegally shipped seeds, USDA has requested the assistance of the state departments of agriculture in collecting seeds from residents. The Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) has processed more than 40 packages of seeds to be tested by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

If you received a package of seeds, make sure to save the seeds and the package they came in, along with the mailing label. Do not open the seed packets. If the packets are already open, place all the materials including seeds and packaging into a zip lock bag and seal it.

DDA is asking you to complete an intake form available online at <https://agriculture.delaware.gov/plant-industries> and submit it along with the sample. This will help investigators have a better understanding of why you were targeted in this brushing scam. If further information is needed, state and/or federal officials may reach out to ask more questions.

Individuals can submit these packages and the intake form either in person or by mail to the Delaware Department of Agriculture, 2320 S. DuPont Hwy, Dover, DE 19901.

While there does not appear to be any human health risks, out of an abundance of caution, people should wear gloves and limit touching the material. People who believe they are

experiencing a health issue as a result of touching these seeds should contact their medical provider.

USDA is looking to obtain as many of these unsolicited seed packages as possible to determine if they present a threat to U.S. agriculture or the environment. Of the seeds identified so far, USDA has found a mixture of ornamental, fruit and vegetable, herb, and weed seeds. These seeds should never be planted; however, if they have been sown, USDA has issued destruction and sanitation instructions (https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/plant_health/faq-unsolicited-seeds.pdf).

Based on information provided by constituents, the packages were sent by mail and may have Chinese writing on them. All contained some sort of seed packet either alone, with jewelry, or another inexpensive item. It is believed that these shipments are part of a brushing scam where shippers send out low-cost items at their own expense in order to rank higher on e-commerce sites. Brushing helps the seller create a more legitimate appearance to their profiles.

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